

give us to the waves

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give us to the waves

by [offday](#)

Summary

“Please come pick me up,” George whispers, cutting a gut-deep cry with a broken-hearted sound. He pleads. He begs. Because he wants Dream here, pressing his hipbone into the bed and bumping it into George’s until he ruins him with a bruise, the shape of a heart, the shape of his mouth.

Dream muffles a sound in his throat, holding himself back from a drive across state borders that would get him to George. “I know, sweetheart.”

He is strong for both of them tonight. And surely, that has to be enough.

A flight stuck in New York before Christmas calls for thoughts of doubt.

Notes

hello!!! sorry this took absolutely way too long, but here is the long awaited part two of [love underwater](#). keep in mind this is part two, so if you have not read part one, it will not make as much sense, but i suppose it can still be read as a standalone.

this one contains a toooooon of growth, as well. lots of building between the two of them, and in themselves, and i hope you enjoy it as much as i did.

please ignore any errors, it's been a tough couple months writing this!! the format gets all wonky sometimes, so if you're reading it the second i post, please ignore anything messed

up, i will fix it later :)

thank u always!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

George is no stranger to the snow that falls, to the lousy weather, to the powder that sets into the ground and the ice that melts into his clunky boots and between the folds of his new jeans.

Lightning rips from the sky through clouds of haze and gray pity, and George gets to watch with tearful eyes and with shaky hands stuck between the cold pockets against his hip. He gets to feel it shake and rip in from his heels and up through body, roughening him up until he coughs into stiff hands.

His face has contoured with tears, shameful skin swelling from the faint crying he had done into the crease of his elbow just earlier, making his eyes heavier and his chest tighter.

Surely the day had given him enough grief already with the confined seat on the plane and the hugging of the sunlight from all around him, lifting and falling in front of his eyes—a fine, soulmesmerizing sight becoming dreadful with the angle of the plane's wing tilt. His muscles and all his teeth were now aching, bones following thereafter, splintering and tearing him apart as he disintegrated into the floor of the airport.

To his left, a child cheers, a berry-red smile on her face turns bright and healing as she sinks into her father's arms, toes lifting from the ground while they spin around and around and then around again until they fall back on a chair together.

It's a reunion, George assumes. There must be a lot of them nearby. Parents and children and grandchildren and couples.

Friends.

This place is unfamiliar to George. This is not London or any other vacation spot he has been to. Italy. France. There is nothing he can say he recognizes, and it certainly is not the airport he's looked at on Google Images with Dream and with Sapnap, trying to understand the layout in case the two of them are late picking him up.

This is New York.

John F. Kennedy International Airport, where George pulls heavy feet through light-ice runways and moves inside until he walks past pretzels and pizzas and smoothies, tears burning in the corners of his eyes, all with his phone clutched hard between his weak fingers, where he walks and walks until his shins burn and until he finds baggage claim.

He hadn't even bothered to call Dream yet. The news had been so abrupt to George and everyone on his flight that the thought of messaging Dream or Sapnap, or Dream's mother, destroyed him.

Poor weather ahead, they had said. Something common, but something unfortunate. No way around with the amount of low fuel from the dodging they had done. A mandatory stop for everyone's safety that had turned into, "we will refund the passengers, but no flights can leave from New York to Orlando tonight."

By the time George makes it to baggage claim, he feels the stickiness of tears against his cheeks. Dew when it's humid or after he's worked out and when sweat has glued against the hairs on his scalp. He's alone, phone in his pocket and jeans rough up against his inner thighs.

Behind him, a young woman near his age holds her arms around her waist and rolls back and forth on the tips of her toes. They find each other's eyes, and George wonders for a moment if she sees the lines of uneasiness that he's cried against his skin.

They watch the bags go around, each one different from the rest. It's odd, George thinks. He figured most were hard to pick from one another. Color and size and shape. But they're all so vastly different.

"Excuse me."

George doesn't want to turn at the sound of her voice behind him. He wants to do this alone, wants to let this feeling eat away at his heart until he is looking out the window of a new plane. But this is not his plan, not his city, not his friend.

And George is only human.

He is kind.

So he turns away from the belt, and regards her with a lift of his swollen mouth, red from the bite of his teeth.

"Do you know if they booked us out for tomorrow, then?" She asks as soon as George's eyes lift to her, her voice hopeful and short. Barely a second later, she adds, "because of the cancellation?"

George takes a glance back at the bags and opens and closes his mouth.

She's confused.

He sees his bag, and he lets it roll past the two of them like it's not even his. Kindness is overpowering him today, and he feels defeated as he pinches the thinnest part of his tongue between his teeth.

He's fucked, but the entire place is fucked and the city is fucked, and George thinks holding a conversation with this poor girl is fucked, too.

"No," he says as graciously as he can. "They can't put us on another flight right now. They partially refunded the tickets so we can buy a new flight out when convenient for the rest of us. Kind of like, I don't know, supposed to be our responsibility, I think?"

"Wait—" *And she's pleading now*, digging a hand into her shoulder as though she had slept wrong over the Atlantic. She's pleading and George is hardly listening and his bag is going to come around again and he surely will miss it just to be kind. "Not now?"

"Not tonight," George clarifies as he leans from one foot to the other. "No flights are supposed to go through one of the states until morning. It's the storm."

The sadness in her voice was enough to scare George. He's hurt too and watching someone else flush with devastation is overbearing to this crammed baggage claim area. Even as she leans against the pole behind her and as her limbs loosen, George can tell it's all flaking from her body, from that tension in her neck and down to the shoes he knows are rosy, the shoes that he knows she wants to rip off her feet. She's gone a little pale, and with a muffled hand over her mouth, she

hiccupps a sob.

“I was supposed to see family tonight,” her passion slips through.

New York isn’t home for any of us right now.

There’s a lot George could say, or rather, things he should say—things he heard from the older gentleman in front of him on the plane and his knowledge on these issues and the city and the nearby hotels and what sorts of transportation the rest of them should take to get around. George should share, especially to someone who is as distraught as he, desiring family and desperate for it.

“It sucks,” George says. “I’m going to get a hotel, I think. I was told the next best flight was probably tomorrow afternoon, so I think I’ll look later at that one.”

She keeps her eyes stable on the floor, but she twists her foot and breathes slower, and then finally looks to George with a soft smile.

“You think that’ll get me to my family the quickest?”

The corners of his mouth twitch upward as Dream comes to mind.

Hot weather. Conversations at midnight that drift into four in the morning. His hand caressing his throat, feeling his pulse, Dream’s words in his ears that sink into his veins. Sugar scrubs and eucalyptus. The shower he knows is waiting for him in Florida.

Those terrible, terrible mirror photos Dream has sent him after he’s worked out—sweat at his bare hip, the smooth curve shown off in the reflection, and a middle finger at the waistband of his pants just to tease him. The achievement of giddiness that lulls him to life. His best friend, the boy he wishes to love, a man he wants to roll around in the grass with until they’re considered family.

“I think it’s going to get me to mine,” George whispers and then nods. He takes a long breath before he says, “if you’d like, we can ride together to a hotel.”

She must see the way George’s eyes are glossy, showing the hiddenness of his emotions. She *has* to see it, and that’s probably why she gives him a silent grin and a nod, a thankful peace offering, and a tilted palm toward his body.

“I’m Lia,” she says.

“George.”

Lia blinks and then tightens her hand around George’s. She’s not as warm as he is, but George sees the slight smile she offers and gives up his friendliness to share some through a grasp of hands. It’s a simple gesture. It’s all that she’s got because she’s thankful and George understands.

The silence inside of the Uber is a lot more peaceful than George thinks it to be. It is what he needs after his eight or nine hours of rigid shoulders and unnerving impatience.

Strangers in new cities have suddenly become his friends and his friends have become strangers in a matter of moments, and in this silence behind windows of glass all George can think about is his last few conversations with Dream hours before his flight.

Bickering and the way pet names licked at his throat and burned the back of his tongue. Frustration and irritability seizing on his skin as Dream gave words of enthusiasm while George shoved shirts and pants and socks into his suitcase, anxiety harboring to his body. When George snapped at him,

Dream had stilled, and George gave him a sincere apology, had called him, "darling," until they were easing smiles onto each other's mouths again.

He remembers now, as he sits in this car with an unsettled body, an uneasy gut, just how innocent Dream's face looked, how his eyes were glassy and tired, how his body fell into hopelessness as he looked past George's eyes and fell into the rightful pit of despair inside of him.

George wishes he would've made last night a lot smoother instead of letting his flight anxiety and his relationship worries catch up to him because as he grips his phone and lets it become sweaty, he thinks of their messages; He thinks of their call and it all seems unbearable to even start thinking of Dream.

"*Safe flight, okay?*" Dream whispered to him carefully after the bickering, right before George had gone to bed, leaving a sliver for fastidious murmurs to hang. "*I'll be right on the other side, George, I promise.*"

Wrong, Dream.

Instead, there was snow and chunks of ice and a man who guided him forward and gave him a bag of cookies to take off the plane into the airport. Instead, he walked on a runway and nearly slipped all to get inside. Instead, there was Lia, who now held her head low like exhaustion was getting to her.

And *where were you, Dream? Where are you?*

George isn't sure if he should offer more care to Lia, maybe a jacket in his luggage from the back of the car that he cannot even get to. He blinks and catches her eye.

"This is terrible, huh?" She sighs, staring at her shoes again.

Maybe the brightness draws George's eyes toward them, too. He bounces his knee a few times, and he nods his head up and down as his lip feels heavy between his teeth.

"I was supposed to meet my best friends for the first time tonight. I'm visiting them for the holidays," he says slowly, lacking the stress he feels suffering back behind his ribs, somewhere near his heart. "We've been friends for years."

Lia watches him for any other flicker in his emotion. She inhales, clicking her tongue in disappointment. "I'm so sorry, George. Have you told them yet?"

When he stops bouncing his knee, she realizes.

"I haven't told my father either. I've got a feeling he'll blame me for the weather." She grins, feeding his worried head with a bit of humor. Something light and something strange for their conversation.

A laugh stops on the end of George's tongue. He almost doesn't know how to take it.

"That's peculiar," he remarks, raising his fingertips to his chin to scratch at the stubble he's got growing.

"Oh, my father is quite a peculiar figure," Lia adds.

It's much warmer inside the car than it is outside now, and George is glad that they're suddenly picking up a conversation and making jokes about Lia's father and talking about George's friends as

if they were here. Maybe it'll help him ease the worries of Dream's response, or the call he had with him last night. Maybe it'll ease the thought of meeting Dream, and George's plans to hold him close, to tip his head back and touch, to reach as far into Dream's heart as he can until they are both gasping and overwhelmingly a mess.

"We'll shower, and I'll hold you, and we'll cook you a steak the night you get in," Dream promised him. *"We can do anything you'd like. How about swimming, would you like that, George?"*

But Dream is nowhere near the state of New York, and George is alone—he fucking hates being alone. And Dream knows this. George bites down on the thought of informing him. It feels like a disappointment to not be there with Dream already.

Even when they stand at the front counter and when George stays to make sure Lia's credit card goes through, George recognizes the loneliness that has crossed over him.

Maybe it's because he knows that he's going to *have* to talk to Dream or that he's preparing himself for it, letting the day settle as his body protects him. But for now, he's got stronger things around him: the beauty of light snowfall and Lia and a warm cup of complimentary hot chocolate.

It is enough for now.

"I think you should tell your friends," Lia says to him as she presses the tip of her shoe into the couch George sits on, both of them now waiting for their rooms to become ready. "I could stay with you if you'd like."

Her words are more of a kind suggestion, but it's a reminder that George doesn't belong here.

George nods anyway.

The lobby is quiet, save for the family of seven with tired children who probably have been traveling just as much as George has. They occupy a few tables, spilled hot chocolate becoming a decoration by now with the youth in their family, but George watches because he cannot help it. He keeps his fists tightened in his lap and opens and closes them when he recognizes the nails digging into his rough skin.

Family.

The last few messages he had sent Dream are defeating to look at. They're a reminder, keen words of enthusiasm from both of them. Promises. A confident and intimate series of words, again and again, until George was in the air.

Then more, when he had landed, that Dream must have sent recently.

we'll do the cinnamon twists too, and i think you'll like them(: they're so fucking good holy shit, you'll love them

The song of guilt seems to play as George taps at his phone. It burns at his fingers and he tries to blur the clinginess of remorse while he messages Dream.

Leaving an unfaithful amount of an afterthought for both him and Dream to wonder what is going on, George sends, *Hi*

Underneath his feet, the floor caves, and George may as well plunge into it with the unexpected change of Delivered to Read, he finds as he quickly goes to type another message. God.

He is humiliated and at fault, and surely someone has clasped at both of his shoulders and has gripped over both of his hands, pushed upon each of his knuckles to stop him from typing because he suddenly cannot write anymore.

Dream types back, and he must be so confused, and he deserves to know what is going on, but the ultimate prickle of terror that has struck George's chest is enough to stop all of his care about any of Dream's thoughts.

Because George feels terrified. Guilty, guilty, guilty as he sucks in a sharp breath.

George? Dream writes.

How he wishes he could look up and stare at the camera on his computer, shrug his shoulders, and let Dream read his body language like he always does, like he's good at—reading through thick lines of tough skin and tight emotion. *He'd get it then.* He'd just understand the parts of George that George cannot even explain to him.

Can I call you in ten minutes? George asks him, writes sharply into his phone, nervously concluding that minutes will feel like years.

He is a fool to think Dream will not push back with more questions. He's always been greedy, has always worried to the highest point when George's responses get short and when explanations run dry.

Today is a day of selfishness and desire and need, and more than anything, passion, so it is no surprise when George finds the call coming through almost instantaneously.

“George!” Dream cries as soon as the button is pressed, the emotion in his voice so clear, so ominous and present. It is almost dull, scratchy enough to become thin.

Weakness was never beautiful when it left Dream's mouth. George heard him regardless. In times of need and in times of harm, George did not know what part of him he should or should not climb into, which parts were forbidden and which Dream wanted George to be let into. But he always tried—he knocked and offered to listen when Dream became just a wire of vulnerability on a phone line.

“Ten minutes,” George pleads, forgetting the sound of his voice in the spaciousness of the lobby. “Please.”

Dream is impatient. It tightens George's throat up when he croaks, “I don't get it. Am I late? Are you—are you here?”

George brings his eyes down at his feet, looking toward Lia's shoes to ground himself, to bring clarity to his moment alone.

“No,” he attempts to ease the both of them in a single breath, changing the taut lines on his face. “I'm not in Florida, Dream.”

Saying his name hurts. Dream will cry for him while George mourns over the sound of it.

“You're not in Florida,” Dream murmurs, defeating himself more and more. Purposely. “You never left home? You—you're still back home?”

George doesn't blame Dream for assuming he's still tucked tightly between his sheets, much further from rain clouds and humidity, and a man who craves and desires him in the same tongue

his heart cannot taste with.

He must think that George's grip on their rope has loosened and that he's let go before even giving himself the chance to yank harder on it, to pull himself even closer to Dream, to come chest to chest and ear to ear until all their thoughts blend into one.

George avoids any sudden movement against the chair he sits on because somehow he can feel Dream behind him and in front of him. He's everywhere. Holding him down like he's begging George to explain what is happening. Dream's hands feel stronger than the rain, heavier than the ocean, thicker than the snow.

Dream needs communication, and George has always given it freely to him upon finding himself slotted between confusion and uncertainty, upon finding the both of them lost in the void of their feelings.

But most times, George doesn't know what to say.

"I'm in New York," he rushes out, trying to speak before another trembling sentence leaves Dream's mouth. "We had to stop off here because of bad weather while traveling, and low fuel, and now we cannot leave until tomorrow at least. I can tell you more, but for now—" George pauses and looks up at Lia's reassuring grin. "For now, I need to settle into my hotel room and I'm scared, Dream, and just—just sad, so can you please wait for me, so I can explain properly?"

George expects Dream's concern to batter the line now.

He's known him for so long, and Dream perks up whenever George is scared or when he's sad or hurt or anxious, and all of this honesty George is giving him is the perfect route for Dream to take, to latch onto, to turn around and ask more.

He doesn't. He's quiet.

"Okay," Dream whispers. "Be careful, George."

Then he hangs up.

—

George doesn't end up calling for another two hours.

He walks with Lia to her room and provides her company while she makes conversation with her father, filling him in about the inconvenience of what is weather and the unfortunate events of landing in an unfamiliar city.

Together, the two of them check flights for tomorrow, book tickets, and make small talk about their school experience back home. It is the first time in hours that George grins. He laughs until his eyes crinkle at the corners and until his mouth hurts.

Dream doesn't call once within those two hours.

Not that George expects him to call, it just hurts knowing that Dream is sitting a few states away with the ill-thought of George's refusal to fly knocked into his head.

And the worst part is that none of what Dream is thinking is the truth.

George wants *this* as much as Dream does, there is just a barrier as huge as rain clouds and poor weather and large states with massive highways and thousands and thousands of cars between the two of them, and George wishes he could explain it without his chest wanting to split open.

There is weather, and now, there are nerves.

He keeps his eyes closed as he dials Dream's number, ear pressing to his shoulder to hold the phone as he bends down to remove his shoes and his socks.

The weakness in his body comes to play, and it all buries inside him, making him ache.

"Hi," Dream answers in a single breath.

George follows the breath like it's his. "Hi."

The room is dim, darkening by the minute as the night takes full control. Underneath him, the bed is made. The air conditioner whirs to life, and George sinks softly on top of the mattress, peering out the fourth-story window. It's prettier in the hotel room than it is downstairs in the lobby, but George is still trying not to choke on the loneliness that floats around him. It is all still there.

Dream says nothing to interrupt the silence, but George knows he is hurting more than what is present.

He should be in Orlando by now. He should be complaining about December heat, squeezing Dream's knuckles, drinking him in as they learn the taste of each other's mouths and how excruciatingly painful it is to stay away.

But he's in this clean room, and his back is touching this firm cushion, and Dream's body is nowhere near where George wants it to be. Nowhere close to his skin. No soft warmth against the cool grip of his own, no curious eucalyptus scent in his nose.

Unfair. *It's so unfair.*

"I feel like this is my fault," George hardly registers himself saying the words.

Dream's breathing picks up. His tight-chested huff is so loud. It's especially loud and cold and painful.

"What?" Dream asks almost bitterly.

Across the room, George watches curtains sway. The window is large, and it beautifully displays the business of a popular city outside. Just another place for him to imagine Dream. Somewhere his eyelashes won't wet with raindrops, but somewhere they will grow heavy with paintings of snowflakes.

Somewhere he will become the canvas.

"George," Dream calls again to gain his attention. "*What do you mean?*"

"I'm sorry, I can't even think right now," George tells him, turning his cheek until it reaches his shoulder. "This just feels unfair."

"Let's take a second then," Dream offers, sounding inaudibly hopeless. "You and me. Together."

We're not. *We're not together.* We are far apart.

"Please," George whispers, rubbing his face further onto his arm.

George wants to stop the heaving he feels in his chest, but it is difficult.

He wants Dream's hands to press into the dips of his waist and he wants his forehead to come close as if nothing else will fix him. He wants touch more than he wants to breathe right now.

They stay quiet for a moment, and George allows for Dream's breaths to soothe his shaky, cold hands as he shoves them underneath his shirt for warmth.

"I feel like I'm to blame because we were weird last night, and now we should be together, but we aren't because of the fucking, *I don't know*, weather?" George admits, speaking just underneath his breath. "I don't want you to be mad at me. Or—Or cry."

Dream hums. "Are you? Are you crying?"

Sticky hands touch sticky skin.

"No," George lies as his fingers dab onto the edges of his tears.

"Sweetheart." Dream is quiet. His voice is tight. "It's okay. I'm not mad at you, George. Just—just talk to me, please?"

George feels honesty rise in his chest when he brings a sad smile onto his face when he envisions Dream's soft expression of a forced grin. He hears it in there somewhere, and he wants to pound his fist onto Dream's chest to whisper, "*fuck you for always trying to make things feel better.*"

"Okay."

"You in the city?" Dream asks lightly, like it's some avoidance of the fact that they aren't together right now.

"No," George answers again as he sniffs. He chuckles, groaning under his breath at the fact that he's in tears. Dream must already know. *He knows everything.* "Just near the airport."

"Well, that's lame."

George hums, letting it recede down the line quietly. He doesn't like the tension he feels or the way he knows Dream has been crying, too. He must have told Sapnap by now, in the past two hours. And his mom. They had to have wrapped up the snacks in the kitchen. The frying oil for the cinnamon twists Dream was excited about. Put up the pool equipment George knows Dream had tugged out and cleaned just so he could have his family and George enjoy it for the next few days.

It's past sunset there, and in New York, and George is alone with the thick beating of his own heart. Not Dream's.

Laughter rises from the room underneath him, and it spikes a surge of *jealousy* in him. George bites his tongue.

"I wish you were here," George tells him through gritted teeth.

It doesn't take Dream but a second to respond. He exhales like he's already driving, like he's crossing states with a water bottle in his cup holder and music sounding through his car. "You know I'd come to you in a second if I could."

At that, George turns his face into his pillow. He lets tears burn his eyes and the hotel sheets.

And quietly, Dream lets him cry.

His ankles rub back and forth over one another to grip warmth as he brings himself back down. Dream's gentle words and whispers become the safety in his background.

George tells him. He tells him every detail from when he was on the plane to when he was in the hotel.

He tells Dream about Lia and about how he's got his new flight booked for tomorrow, somewhere around noon. He tells him about the heartache he's got caught in his throat and all the ice that had been stuck in his shoe.

And then Dream speaks.

He admits to George that he is sorry and that he thought George's hesitancy about their friendship and their desires had dragged him down. He thought George had stayed home and initially it had destroyed him, and for just a few moments, Dream hadn't known how to feel. He admits it, and George gnaws on the end of his lip in silence.

"I would have told you," George sighs, still unsure from Dream's words. "If I was doubting us, or this. I would have said something about staying home."

His hands float over his chest and he feels his heartbeat steadily thumping underneath his skin. It's a comfort to have it underneath his fingertips for just a moment, to recognize that sense of security on his own.

He and Dream have done this quite a few times. Talked into the late hours of the night, worrying if their conversation from so long ago had been too quick of a dip into lust. If it had dragged them rather than how they wished they would have sunk slowly into it. If maybe George had been holding his breath that night, and now he can breathe.

It hurts him to think that way.

But doubt doesn't leave after one conversation.

"I know," Dream says. "I trust you."

The furrow of George's brow quirks before he wants it to.

He rolls his eyes before shoving his nose into his pillows.

Trust is hard. Trust is truth. And George can hear how loud Dream is thinking about it.

An exhale is enough to startle George.

"Are you scared?" George asks.

Dream's answer comes quickly. "Yes."

"Do you think you'll be different when we meet?" George asks, remembering how he's asked before and how he's felt over the same question.

This time it is different. They are closer, and George hates to ponder like this, but he isn't sure if New York is now considered his place to think. About Dream and about what sort of relationship

they've built with each other, what relationship they're currently building.

He fears Dream's answer. He fears it'll differ from his, and that Dream will touch him, graze his cheeks, kiss his mouth like he's in love the second they touch. When George is scared that Dream's skin won't feel like he wants it to, or that his pulse, *Dream's pulse*, won't beat in the rhythm he desires. And maybe it's the selfishness of not wanting to learn Dream and already wanting to know him, to have him, but George is terrified of it all.

"I am," Dream says. "I think I am scared."

"Me too," George breathes in relief.

A pause gets to them, beats and bangs on their chests for a while before either of them says another word.

George wonders if Dream has tears in his eyes or if he'd say anything about it if he did—if he'd let George know so he could help convince him things were okay.

But he says nothing.

"Do you think it's a bad thing that we are scared now? So suddenly?" George asks him, opening his mouth and letting honestly bleed off his tongue.

Dream hums.

"I don't know. I don't think so? I think we haven't ever met before—so I think it's okay to worry good and bad about what would happen between us, you know?" He says lightly, humming again before pausing. He grunts and then takes a deep breath. "Can I FaceTime you?"

George lets him.

It's one way to be less lonely in this box of unfamiliarity.

Seeing Dream's face and his smile and having this conversation may rip him open some more, but it'll piece him back together because *at least he can see him*.

George holds the phone between his hands, flutters his eyes to a close at the warmth that settles near his sternum.

He whispers a simple, "hi," the moment Dream's face shows up on his screen.

"Hi," Dream says lowly.

The smile rising to Dream's face brings a tinge of pink to George's skin. It tickles at the edges of his neck and then the roots of his hair, and he pushes the crown of his head further into the mattress to get rid of the itch. He grins and closes his eyes again, focusing on the steadiness of Dream's breathing that he's suddenly aware of. It has always calmed him.

"Let me look at you," Dream says soft-spoken, eyes blinking slowly in apology.

George's eyes open and he turns onto his side, propping his phone up like he's done many times before. Behind the top of the phone is the window, and George sees the flickering of a neon sign. He sort of wished the curtains were closed now because he wants to see nothing but Dream.

"Do you get what I mean?" Dream swallows in a whisper, bringing them back to their previous conversation.

It's quite easy to follow the way Dream blinks, and to copy it like he is doing it himself. If George thinks hard enough, this could be their bed George is lying in.

George brings one shoulder up. "I don't know."

"I mean that—you and I haven't gotten together because of these worries. I told you I was scared of loving you too hard and you told me you wanted everything I had to give. We both weren't sure if that—if it was too much, too soon. So we haven't given in. And we weren't sure how we'd be once we were side by side. Those are reasons, George. Fears, I guess."

"I know."

Dream hitches a breath. "We said we'd wait. We promised each other that we wouldn't commit to a relationship until we tried it in person. Until we tried *us*. Because in the end—we both are a little scared of what could happen."

George knows. But the feeling of that is so fucked. He's impatient, and he's scared that trying at all will ruin what he's got in his hands, all safe and sound right in front of him.

"What if it's not what you want, though?" George pleads softly.

Dream scoffs. "Fuck, George. This isn't a way to pull back now. New York isn't going to be some halfway point where you get to go home. Please. Stop. Don't tell me that."

Love me too hard.

Love me as hard as you can.

I will take everything you give me.

"I know," George frustratingly kicks his feet at the end of the bed. He bites at his lip. "I know that. I'm not giving up. I'm just—" He stops.

George sees the glossiness of Dream's eyes when he leans toward the phone. "Talk to me, please. I want to know why you're thinking this way." Dream scrunches his nose up, pushing his finger into the cushion of his cheek as he blinks at George, hoping to receive a word of accord.

Please, the look says. *Help me understand.*

George clears his throat and then cranes his neck to the ceiling. Dream stares and George can tell Dream is staring, watching him like he watches the stars on a good night, breathing deeply like he wishes he could breathe into the crevasse of George's neck that he is looking at.

Dream wants in, and all George has been doing is building wall after wall between them every chance he gets.

"I'm sorry. I don't know why I'm letting my trust in you fail this soon," George breathes out his honesty, not wanting to hold back any piece of himself. "I think I am just scared that you're going to pull away from me. You've not even met me yet."

Dream gives a careful hum like he's listening, like he wants George to go on. He's motionless on the screen, except for the few longer blinks and the open and close of his wet lips.

George wishes he could be right on the end of the hotel mattress, near the window where he loves the thought of him, doused in moonlight and dripping in gold, maybe rain, too, if it were to fall,

with a crooked smile and white teeth that peek from lazy lips. George wants it so badly.

He continues at the ache and the encouragement of Dream's silence.

"I have so many thoughts of you in all these little things, Dream. Like when you told me you thought of me in the grocery store. I think of you like that, too. But doing those things *with me*.

"I think of you cooking with me, or helping me edit, putting your stupid hand over mine on the stupid mouse. I think of us swimming together, riding in the car, and making breakfast at odd times of the day. Or staining the wooden deck outside that you said you hadn't gotten around to because—I don't know, why the hell not!"

He wavers. Dream stays quiet.

"But then I think so intently that I wonder if maybe you'd hate all the things I want to do. What if you don't like cooking with the same spices I do? What if night driving isn't your thing, but it's mine? And then maybe we'd argue because we can't pick the right music. What if you don't want to lie with me all day in bed, or what if I frustrate you? You don't *see so many parts of me*, and I am scared you will not like them when you see them. I don't know. And I hate thinking of that, and I hate thinking of you being disappointed in these things."

George takes a final breath, "it is just easier to manage when we are away from each other."

This honesty makes George feel dry, and when he clears his throat, he almost doesn't recognize the cry that surges from his lips. It chokes him, and he cannot swallow it down. It turns into a sob, and he sniffles and wipes at his face, steadyng both his breathing and his expression before he looks at Dream, apologizing softly as he coughs.

Rather than feeling weak tonight, dragging his body through what feels like mud, George feels shattered. The mud is not thick. It is dried. It is dirt. And George is stuck in cracks that are too small, cracks that are begging to tug him farther and farther into the earth.

But Dream has a hand held around him, right around George's wrist, where his pulse bumps in light song, something he has always sworn to hold George with.

The single wrap around his own heart, the extra strength George needs. It has always been Dream.

"Baby," Dream whispers, losing composure in the voice he gives. "I am in love with you."

George's chest is plenty ruined already, and all of Dream's efforts to heal him, by words and by whispers, are going to piece George into this statue of trust eventually. A confession of love in a city of life with unfamiliar people is terrifying, but it is everything Dream is—unpredictable and full of rich colors that George can feel with his chest as he splays his fingers over the center most part of his sternum.

Thud and then thud and then thud again, even faster as he feels for this man causing this beat, because Dream is in love with him and George can taste it in his mouth as he bites on his tongue.

Dream continues, "and that means that—that means that if you want me to listen to some shitty playlist and drive for hours with you, *I will*. If you want me to stay underneath the covers with you for the entire day when I've got work to do, then *I will*. If you want to cook with something I despise, then *I will* try it. *I will*."

A pause forces a breath out of Dream. He must be afraid that holding it in will harm him, and then George, too.

"We bicker, George. It's just what happens between us because we've been friends for as long as the both of us can remember. And I don't want you to think that'll just disappear," he says in a thin line of laughter. "That's just us, dude."

George catches the frustrating glint in his eye when he looks down at the phone, though, and he wishes he were nearer because he can see what Dream wants. George wants to reach and tell him *Yes. Reach back. Grab Me. Hold me. Talk more to me.* But his mouth is sealed shut by the explicit look that shatters on the phone screen. "—But the reason we won't *fight* like we hate each other is because I promise you I will take time to love you how you want to be loved."

No interruption should ever be found during Dream's words, whether he is speaking to a crowd of thousands of people on the internet, or a singular person just a few states away, lying on the emptiness of a bed, a cold-hearted soul dying to be charmed with Dream's mouth.

George wants to understand it quicker. Simpler. He wants to roll his nose into his fist and sob and become selfish over these words. Because they are his.

But he has been so worried about trusting himself and trusting Dream to *trust him*, that hearing this nearly crumbles him.

"Yeah," George finally whispers, clenching a fist into midair instead to grip. Hope. Love. "Okay."

"*Okay?*" Dream croaks, his voice pooling underneath something dangerously fragile. "You hear me, George? I want to learn how you want to be loved. I will learn how you want—this or that or everything."

This or that. George would prefer he open his chest up and take it all.

George knows his hands are too soft to keep holding onto Dream. His fragility has turned to sand, and he is slipping between his fingers, but he tries. *He is trying.* And he starves in the sheets of a foreign bed while he cradles himself.

"Please come pick me up," George whispers, cutting a gut-deep cry with a broken-hearted sound. He pleads. He begs. Because he wants Dream here, pressing his hipbone into the bed and bumping it into George's until he ruins him with a bruise, the shape of a heart, the shape of his mouth.

Dream muffles a sound in his throat, holding himself back from a drive across state borders that would get him to George. "I know, sweetheart."

He is strong for both of them tonight. And surely, that has to be enough.

"We can be uncertain, George," Dream whispers, damaging the already broken glass they live on. "But don't let that break us. *We can't let that break us.*"

Lia's father is a *very* southern man.

He is from Texas. Born and raised into loving everything a man from Texas would love. He wears boots that are squared off at the toe, boots that look strong enough to kick George back into last Saturday. He wears thick denim jackets in the Florida rain, stands outside of the baggage claim

doors with his hands in his pockets like he fears the wetness between the pads of his fingers, wears a daunting smile when he sees his daughter walk outside with another man at her side that she's told him about.

"Hi," Lia says as she lifts her jacket to cover her head from being rained on.

She leans into a hug and embraces her father, and both of them mumble about poor weather in two separate accents. It's endearing to George, and he gives a smile as he wobbles back and forth beside the two of them.

George pushes her suitcase over, sniffles awkwardly, and nods his head to her father in greeting.

The man thanks George for keeping Lia company in New York, shaking his hand with a powerful grip. He hands him a couple of caramels that had been lodged in his front jacket pocket, too, which gives George just another reason to grin playfully.

George thinks Lia was right about her father. He is quite peculiar.

By the time George gets an awkward laugh out, followed by a handshake, he realizes that there is a body leaning against the column about fifteen feet away, dressed in new sneakers and a plain shirt, black jeans that look worn.

Dream.

Downcast eyes start shaping the floor that George's feet press into and a wry grin dusts his face. It's Dream, tapping against his jean-covered thigh that George has never seen before, rolling back and forth on what must be anxious toes.

George's blank eyes don't avert too far. He doesn't want them to. It'd be disrespectful of him to look away, to leave what little conversation he is having with Lia and her father, just to note his best friend.

"Thank you again, George," Lia says as she steps back, departing from George with a shy smile. She tilts toward her father, who offers the same kindness as her.

Returning it, George takes a half-glimpse into Dream's line of vision. It's a mere *look*, and George hardly expects Dream to catch his gaze, but from the slight angle of his chin upwards, the two of them make eye contact for the first time.

And suddenly color flares every inch of his face, violet creeping into depths he hardly knows about. He scrunches his nose as he looks away, unsticking the honey he feels in his throat.

When Lia leaves, Dream steps forward. He is slouching and instead of a wry smile, this time he's shy. He looks almost identical to how George saw him last night when he had whispered to George about trying not to puncture their relationship and standing on their feet together rather than falling behind on their asses. Don't break us. Or don't let us break. George isn't sure, but Dream is rounded and soft on every curve and edge and tip of his hair and he is beautiful and George is almost positive that he is going to fuck this entire thing up.

"Hi," he whispers, looking down at Dream's whitened shoes. They call his attention. They're stupid white, so of course they do. They're all bright, and George almost concludes that *yeah*, maybe Dream bought new shoes just to pick him up from the airport.

Dream breathes out a sigh, and that enough has George raising his eyes. He looks at Dream properly, finding beauty licking along his jaw like the rain does, sticking on his stubble and

holding on to the tips of his eyelashes.

He's got rain on his goddamn eyelashes.

"George," Dream exhales quietly, reaching a hand out to where the handle of his suitcase is. "Can I?"

This is primarily one of the worst moments of George's life. When Dream extends his hand in that way George has been envisioning for months, he reaches his own forward, turning his palm in doubtful innocence, soon being filled with the contentment of touch. Dream doesn't laugh, but he holds on, and he paints his thumb over the back of George's hand in a silly, very awkward half-handshake.

"Hi," he murmurs, letting out a chuckle thereafter.

George pulls away quickly, covering his cheeks with the same blush he's been dying to show Dream.

"I thought you meant—I didn't know you were about to ask for my luggage." He peeks through his fingers just in time to see Dream reaching for him.

"Come here, George, my god," he says lovingly, before clutching the bones of George's wrists in his hands, pulling him into his chest where their bodies concave together, falling into some forlorn embrace of tenacious limbs and shaky fingers.

Relief floods through him. Dream gives him relief as they stand there, as his arms tighten and tighten and as George's breath leaves his mouth and disappears into the crevasse of Dream's shoulder. He smells of sleep. Or at least what George would imagine Dream's bed would smell of. Warmth and safety and home. Something like clean linen and lavender. He can't smell eucalyptus on him, and it makes his heart beat even faster because he *wants it*, and he craves to find it when they're home, so his hands grip harder onto Dream and he digs his nose further into his shoulder as he drinks in more of him.

"I made it," George whispers to him.

"You did, didn't you?" Dream strokes a hand up his back, thick fingers sliding up his spine, stopping along each vertebrae to press like he's reaching for where his heart lies.

The baggage claim wasn't nearly as crowded as New York's. But now it's rainy, and George supposes that neither of them really cares. About whether people notice them, or whether rain drips behind their ears and sinks into the skin of their forearms. Here. Or near the car when Dream bumps into him while trying to show George the new features on his car.

"I can show you more later. I was just excited to show you," Dream says as he stands with a cocked elbow behind his head. He scratches his hair a few times to get some rain out, and then hums when he notices George's position, still standing, still cold, still with a backpack a few feet away from Dream. "Sorry! Sorry. We can get in now. *Sorry.*"

In the car, they are quiet.

George watches the street lamps go by just as fast as the cars do. He checks his phone, rubs his thumb over the lack of notifications now that Dream is here in the car, one hand tucked low on the steering wheel and the other tapping patiently on his own thigh.

There's something different, at least now that he sits near Dream, with that tethered sensation of

warmth all sticky on his left side—Dream’s body heat just a few inches from his own. It’s inevitable to feel giddy, being in the same car as him, sitting with their thighs parallel, both of them with thoughts of having their limbs tangled rather than straight like this.

He’s hopeless to feel, to know what more of Dream’s skin feels like. Whether it’ll burn or soothe.

George reaches out first. Just a hand onto the middle console where Dream’s forearm already rests. He touches with the hesitancy of an anxious bird, feet just crawling toward the ledge, fingertips gnawing toward Dream’s skin.

There is no effort, no giving in from Dream. He just watches the road and inches his arm away like he’s playing with George, like they’re playing a game of—*Reach. Reach. Reach.*

They go back and forth until they reach the house, until its cobblestone path and dying rose bushes come into view, until Sapnap’s all black Model S tail lights catch his eye, and until George’s fingers finally wrap around Dream’s wrist in nervousness.

A new first touch.

Skin to skin.

A burn.

“What?” says Dream over the hushed breath. He chuckles, “you nervous to meet him? You like the guy or something?”

His attitude is alluring, same as it has always been with that flirty tongue and low-toned hum he echoes every time he laughs behind his teeth.

George glares at him while his heart flip-flops into his throat.

“Shut up,” he says irritably, reaching for the door. He turns back Dream’s way with flustered cheeks. “Shut. Up.”

Dream’s face tangles from humor to content in a matter of moments as George stays leaned against the window. He stares at George like he’s looking through him, and then right out the window, and as George stays motionless, he levels himself to think.

There’s still the last remnants of a smirk on Dream’s face when he reaches his hand forward.

“Can I get one last hug before I lose you to Sapnap for the night?” He asks, laughing after almost every word he speaks.

“My god, Dream,” George laughs back, knowing his chest expands in what seems like peace. He feels like he’s coming home. “You’re so embarrassing!”

Dream scowls at him playfully, latching onto George’s wrist and intertwining their fingers as he pulls him closer. The width of Dream’s hand courses over George’s back before he’s letting go in places and touching in others, reaching for skin and hoping for heat. Just like George is.

The blush on George’s cheeks reaches his ears when Dream says, “I’m not embarrassing. Just give me a damn minute to hold you, *fuck.*”

George gives a stronger grip onto Dream’s neck, breathing in where his nose pokes at his jugular, where Dream’s heartbeat—where their heartbeat—thumps and thumps, almost too fast for the

small embrace in the car.

He wants to say something about their call from the hotel and about their promises, about their hopes and their desires and their agreements. About how Dream loves him. But there are parts of him that say that this is love.

Dream's pulse.

Dream's collarbones.

The way their chests are touching over the middle console.

How they haven't even mentioned the fact that they are both extremely desperate to crawl into each other's skin right now, and instead are sitting outside of the home George has been waiting forever to see.

Maybe this is exactly how love between them is supposed to feel.

Somewhere around eight in the morning is when George concludes that Dream's bed smells of chlorine and fresh linen. It's a concoction of the scents, plus the rosiness of the shampoo George had found in Dream's shower last night.

Maybe it's because he's washed his sheets and his blankets right before George's arrival, or maybe it's because his softener smells absolutely phenomenal—George isn't sure.

No traces of eucalyptus hang in the air or on the insides of the walls or even the mattress. Not even in between the sheets. George thought Dream might've been hiding sugar scrubs or his oils because all that lingered near the bathroom was rose and chlorine.

George hadn't really known rose. He hadn't given himself the time to take the color pink and think of blushing cheeks on Dream's face, pushed down into pillows or strawberry-flavored ice cream.

New York felt gold. London felt light blue.

But inside Dream's home was rose. Baby pink walls and rose bushes, counters so smooth with granite, and floor shiny just like Lia's shoes.

Rose. Innocence and delicacy and romance. Admirations and impulses and things that George was unfamiliar with. Things he gnawed at with sharper teeth and looked at with wider eyes.

And then now, as he glanced down at Dream, whose hands must've been of dried sweat and chlorine from the pool hours ago from when they had swam in the early hours of the morning with Sapnap.

Tired eyes wrecked George, but an interested soul and a warm body all begged him to stay in the pool as Sapnap and Dream made him laugh and then laugh again.

Home drew him closer last night. *This morning*. And after hours of soda and new snacks and Sapnap's terrible fingers shoving chips into his mouth, he buried away into the sanctuary of Dream's bed.

He flutters his eyes open as soon as he wakes, buries his nose back into Dream's pillow when he realizes how little sleep he's gotten.

They hadn't had time to set up the guest bedroom, is what he told himself yesterday when he rolled his suitcase through the door. He hadn't even seen the damn room.

But as morning comes, George's heart turns in his chest. It sinks into his belly the moment he pokes his head off the edge of the bed.

Dream lies on his stomach, the nape of his neck and his upper back the only thing exposed to George underneath the thick blankets. His hair is a mess, dried from the chlorine, and shaken around from the tossing and the turning he must have done.

There is no sunlight peeking in like George expected in his bedroom. No creeping curtains to give a little gift of warmth on a light morning, all before the heavy heat of humidity came later.

It is dark.

But George can still make out the lines of tension that are caved in on the upper muscles of Dream's back and along his cheekbones, dug sweetly into the twitch of his grin when he turns his face to George to look upward.

He blinks just once.

George has seen this before, back home when they have slept on call together. The way Dream's eyes flicker open, the way he doesn't greet him, but the way he just looks at George instead.

He remembers the two of them coming back late last night, turning on the television as Dream left for more blankets, for more warmth. George isn't even in his own clothes. He recalls changing, reaching for a scented lotion as he dug through Dream's drawers for something to wear.

"What are you doing down there?" George whispers, still scared of his voice at the early hour.

Dream perches onto his elbow. He shrugs.

"I dunno," he says. "I didn't know if it would be okay for me to sleep next to you yet. Just wanted to give you some space."

George's cheeks tinge with that of a blush, and he recognizes the nerves underneath his tongue as his mouth forms into a smile. His eyes squint as he looks over the entirety of Dream's face. His hair and his bone structure—his jaw and the whites of his teeth, the reddened tip of his tongue that wets his fairly pink lips.

He sniffls down below, and George cocks his head to the side, rubbing his ear against the pillow that is not his. He rests it.

"Thank you," he hums, letting his eyes flutter back to a close.

And he means it. *He does*.

He drops his hand off the side of Dream's bed to prove that he is thankful for the space, and he waits for Dream's fingers to clasp over his. He waits for a touch to regard his hand, *his skin*, in the privacy of Dream's unfamiliar and dark room.

When Dream reaches, George grips. His eyes do not open, but he holds tight as Dream's thumb

rubs back and forth, and then back again.

His heart melts, and a warmth covers all of his senses.

“You told me once before that you wanted to make me breakfast my first morning here,” George says as he peers down at Dream moving back and forth over the little makeshift bed he’s made on the floor.

Dream exhales. “I know. You’re not a breakfast fan. You also told me you hate waking up alone, so I chose not to leave you.”

For just a second, George holds his breath. He finds Dream’s eyes, loosens his tension at the thought of this man below him and his capability of *being*.

He’s captivated by the words.

“Would you like to join me?” George asks carefully.

“In *my* bed?”

George grins. “In your bed, Dream.”

They share a look as Dream climbs up, little sounds echoing against the walls as the bed below them squeaks. Their hands stay clasped together and Dream keeps his distance even when his side reaches a comfortable position next to George.

He listens to Dream’s faint breathing at the shell of his ear. It’s a hot breath that encourages him to tilt toward it, to bring his chin closer to Dream’s mouth.

“You remembered,” George says under his breath. “About the whole ‘morning thing.’”

“How could I not?” Dream answers as he sticks his toes right between George’s shins. “*Oh. Sorry.*”

George makes room, though. He parts his legs and clamps down around Dream’s freezing foot for the hopelessness of intimacy. *Because he wants it.* He wants closeness, wants his soul to fill with a sweetness that only Dream could taste like. He wants to fill to the brim with it until it pours from his nose and drips back into his mouth.

Dream drops his forehead forward with relief, floating in and out of timidity thereafter. George’s touch must do that to him, must open his brain in new ways as the contact breathes against him.

“Your feet are cold, you know,” George lifts a shaky hand to Dream’s chest, buttering up the rising center of where his heart lies.

“Sorry,” he apologizes again, voice toned with nervousness.

George is almost awestruck at the way Dream watches him, chin angling downward to glance over George’s fingers as he shifts from chest to collarbone to another one.

The mattress gains heat the longer they lie in it. It loses the original chill it first had when George had sat down. But his fingers still hesitate over Dream’s body like he is made of glass, as if he will shatter underneath the blades George is made of.

“This is how I imagined it that one night,” George whispers through his teeth, lips still too dry and mouth too fearful to open. These places are unknown to him. “When I told you I was touching

myself and thinking of you.”

Dream keeps a breath in his throat and lets it knock the back of his teeth. “Oh,” he says desirably.

His eyes appear boundless, color all stashed away behind the familiarity of eyelashes that George has seen through phone screens and late-night calls, and computer screens that are black and powered off somewhere far away from where he is now. George doesn’t look away. It would be impossible to look away now.

The way Dream looks at him shakes a breath from George’s throat. Sucks it entirely from his body and replaces it with a sheet of gold, which dizzies him until he echoes the shy grin.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” George asks him, pushing his chin backward until he can see more of Dream’s face.

“Because I want you to show me,” Dream pulls his bottom lip back between his teeth, worries it tensely and then subtly as he looks between George’s eyes. “I want to see where your hands were. Will you show me?”

George leans up onto his hip and bumps his chin with the bottom of his fist. He giggles under his breath, lights carefully with the dizziness of a blush. It tingles. He adores its sting. “I’ll show you.”

Dream seems hesitant before he answers. “You will?”

“Course I will,” he says, lifting a ready-like hand, directing it over the comforter where his thigh rests.

George wants to.

He wants to show Dream just what a touch means to him, just what his own hand had done when it hesitated over his body all that time ago, when his breath had caught in his throat and when he thought only of Dream.

Dream watches like he’s trying not to let a fish get away, like George is slipping past him quicker than he had fallen into his hands.

His eyes tilt to George and then up to his face, and his mouth curls and rests into a smile, something shy of a smirk. He wipes it with the back of his hand as though he’s embarrassed by it, still turned in George’s direction, flitting his eyes back and forth over hand and thigh and mouth.

In the fair seconds of their moment, Dream exhales a stuttered breath. He swallows before George speaks.

“First, it was like this,” George says, dragging his touch up to his belly, pushing just underneath the expanse of his chest. He glances toward Dream and then presents a hand. “Here, follow me.”

His hand guides up until he is touching the edge of his jaw. It burns a little, touching himself like this, bringing the sting of his own fingers against his skin. He’s remembering, and with remembering comes feelings and thoughts and doubts.

Dream nods. “Yeah?”

George doesn’t want to approach fear. Instead, he wants to burn it away with this touch. This is *his* bed that he owns with Dream, that he gets to recognize and lie in, that he gets to engrave with his lungs of honey and lingering uneasiness.

“Just like this,” George tells him, feeling the press of Dream’s hand cupping over his. “I imagined your hand touching me here.”

He feels pressure over his skin, the bones of his wrist the only thing separating Dream’s touch against his face. His heart moves louder behind his ribs the longer he stays away.

“Like this?” Dream asks, slipping his fingers between George’s until he touches the heated bareness of his cheek, high near the bone.

George is weak underneath him, slowly letting go of both heart and soul, giving it up and wearing it on the outside of him. Dream can see it too, and he taunts George’s skin by pressing deeper until his nail beds ask for him to stop, until George closes his eyes and giggles in response. They are touching, and George swallows because *this* is what he has been afraid of most, but exactly what he has been waiting for. A cruel pinch of pain that reveals too much emotion.

They turn against the bed.

George veers the direction of both of their hands down his neck and mourns the warmth against his cheek the second he loses it.

“Perfect,” he says when Dream pulls the pressure from over his cheek and rests his thumb over George’s lip.

Dream is quiet for the time he traces lines of red, deep crevasses in an open-ended ocean. George parts his mouth. The trenches cave even further.

“You said you had touched your mouth,” Dream utters underneath his breath, nervously taking his eyes back and forth and then around again between George’s eyes and then his lips and the tip of his nose. “Can I?”

His blush is hardly that of a bite, just tiny pink buttons on the apples of his cheeks, fruits that have stung onto his skin. George adores it. It makes him dizzier by the moment.

Reaching his hand out to touch blindly, George holds onto the edges of Dream’s waistband.

“I did,” he sort of pleads. “Yes.”

He wants Dream to push a thumb through, to get closer, to dig a nail in his skin until it rains through the crack of glass, droplets on his eyelashes, shattering him with something that will make him shiver.

Dream’s heart pounds. “George.”

It is enough to make George shiver.

George touches his waistline. Warm, sweet, and gold.

“God,” George exhales as he lets his mouth fall open. His forehead cannot fall forward because Dream’s hand cups his face, delicately holding him.

“Are you okay?” Dream asks, letting his eyes take the gaze of hidden worry. *Are you still scared?* He means to ask.

“I’m okay.” George breathes, winding up the end of Dream’s shirt, pulling and pulling him closer until their chins can touch. “It’s so much more than I thought it would be.”

“And it’s good?” Dream hesitates. He turns his head and presses his mouth toward George’s ear, whispering just on the edge. “It’s good that it’s—that it’s different?”

“It’s good. It’s good, Dream. It’s good.”

He’s released a dam. Into more of that ocean, filling it with a filthy amount of his previous doubtfulness, raising the surface until it covers his throat with the coolness of a water level of his liking.

Dream has released one too, because his hands become more sturdy, less shaky than they were before. He touches George like he is made of gold, not glass. Like he is solid, no longer hollowed out on the inside. He touches with his full palm, fingertips leading and guiding and promising the gift of more, more, more.

“I didn’t give up,” George tells him under his breath, drifting both of their hands to his chest, “—touch me here,” he says lightly. “I couldn’t have given up because there is so much of you I want.”

Dream’s hand meets the bare skin over George’s heart. Like it’s been his prize the entire time. “I know, god, George, I know. I trusted in that.”

They touch slowly.

They touch gingerly.

They breathe heavily onto cheeks of cold skin and reddened noses that are bitten by the frost of the air conditioner, just to be closer.

George, although desiring much, much more, rolls onto his stomach, retracting all touch from Dream, bringing a shield between the two of them. Dream makes a sound, sitting up just on the perched elbow closest to George. He touches the exposed skin on his shoulder with a single finger, lazily drawing back-and-forth lines with it.

“Do you want to go back to sleep?” Dream asks him with a hum after giving them both some silence.

“No,” George says into his pillow, sighing shakily. He turns his head Dream’s way and closes his eyes once Dream can see his face. “I don’t want to leave your side. But I want to shower.”

“I can, uh, I mean. We can shower together, if you’d like?” Dream pushes the hair back on George’s forehead. “If you want to.”

This prolonged hope of dreadful desire is now sitting right at the edge of George’s bones. It has enhanced, and each time Dream’s touch lingers on him, it stirs the lust inside. And perhaps it is that simple touch George wants more of, red fruit becoming stomped underneath his feet, squashed berries blending with the blush on his face.

“Yes,” he answers and sighs into the rosy air between them.

And so Dream takes him there, leads him there with just a pinky interlocked at George’s ring finger.

Dream undresses George button by button with his nimble fingers until his sleep shirt opens, leaving just a pathway of heat through the nakedness of his chest.

And George undresses Dream, feels for the fluttering of his quick-beating heart against his neck

and over his slowly rising chest. His tongue grows heavier the longer he holds it back, the longer the two of them stand in silence, the longer the bathroom fills with steam and unspoken words and desire.

Underneath the water, they are different.

Eucalyptus spreads beyond them, *finally*, and turns their air into a faint green they cannot see.

But it is beautiful, and it's there, and it smells like coming home, like settling down, like George is stepping in the right direction and like he hadn't spent the night in New York and like he hadn't doubted their relationship.

George cups a hand over Dream's forehead, attempting to prevent the fall of water into his eyes. He giggles into his collarbone, bites four kisses onto the muscle near his shoulder, and then messily weakens into Dream's arms as soon as open palms press to his back.

It stirs a gentle hum from Dream. A delicate sound that has George sunny inside.

"I was wrong," George breathes into the small space between his mouth and Dream's skin. "About what I said, about it being easier from a distance."

He rubs the tip of his knee into Dream's thigh, tickling a swift sensation of closeness with Dream who still holds gracefully at George's hips. When he looks up, when he looks at the soap dripping down temples and cheeks and the swell of Dream's neck, he finds the small radiance behind Dream's expression. The hope. The love that is electric within him.

George continues, smearing a thumb along the soap above Dream's eyebrow. "It's so easy being here with you."

Dream sinks his fingers right at the bone of George's hip, letting water, his emotion, and cramped tension all fall with the lingering edges of a touch.

As he brings his hands up and down, George breathes. It's like the fingers guide his lungs, his breath.

"Do you think so?" Dream asks.

The air shifts around them when Dream kisses the wet top of George's shoulder. Not as a surprise to anyone in the shower, but as a surprise to his own body, George's knees weaken more, and his chuckle catches in the center of his throat.

George slides a hand up Dream's chest to rest along his sternum, somewhere near where his heart beats the loudest, vibrating sensitively underneath the pads of his fingers.

"I think it feels like I'm riding some sort of wave." George doesn't look at him, moving his hand across Dream's upper body where it is soft. From right to left and then to center again. "It's so smooth standing here. Kind of like I am floating."

He talks gracefully, like his tongue has all the power. Like he has none.

"Think that's cause I'm holdin' you up, baby."

George huffs out a laugh. "No," and then he looks down to where Dream's hands meet his skin, "well, okay, yes, but—that's not what I mean."

Laughter mixes with warm, humid air beneath the shower head, and George looks back to find Dream's eyes blinking slowly at him. "I know. Tell me what you mean then, I want to hear more."

So George tells him.

He claws as far into the center of his core as he can, digs up where his desire is, where his lust and his pain and his fear and his love have been burrowed away, where it all has been bundling together in some overwhelmingly huge knot. And when he looks back through the steam at the man in front of him to find blushed cheeks and hopelessness and curiosity in his eyes, he speaks.

"I want you inside me," George whispers to him, turning his flat hand into a fist over Dream's heart, scratching over his skin.

The confession is real. It's short, faint enough to draw near gasps from the both of them. George swallows nervousness back down, replacing it with a breath of Dream when the man in front of him shivers.

"Okay. Tell, uh, tell me more, George. Please." He begs weakly.

And George's teeth ache for this like they had back at the airport. It burns up in his head, back at the nape of his neck, because maybe this is just their thing.

Tell me where you touched yourself.

Tell me more about how you want me inside of you.

Tell me, tell me, tell me.

Tell me how these feelings between us feel like little bees in our bellies and like blood in our mouth, and how we cannot tell the difference because both are a little too painful.

George reaches his hand to the dip in Dream's neck, pressing just one finger to where his pulse is.

It thumps, and it thumps, and it becomes louder and louder, louder, *louderlouderlouderlouder*.

George kisses it. He mouths at it, uses all but teeth as he feels Dream's knees go weak around him. His fingers grip tighter and he nearly cries into the crevasse of Dream's neck.

"Yours," he whispers to him. "I think so much about how I want to be yours, Dream."

Dream turns him around and brings George's back to his chest, letting him fall against the wet skin like all he's had to do was let his trust go. Which, quite frankly, has been the hardest part.

George holds his breath as Dream drapes arms around his waist and as he holds him, as his chin tucks neatly at his shoulder, and until his mouth can graze his ear.

"I don't think there ever was a time you weren't."

"But we weren't confident," George corrects, tightening his grip over Dream's arms when he scrunches his nose in frustration over his own choice of words.

He doesn't mean to go backward.

George wants forward. He wants to send them *this* way, not *that* way, not backward to where he is scared, but forward to where he is confident and ready, and eager, and pleased. Always pleased and ready.

“Are we now?” Dream asks, like today is any different than yesterday.

George contemplates as he stands, as the water pours over his shoulders and runs down his chest.

No. They’re not. Neither of them are. But does confidence need to be prominent for them to work? Right now? Tomorrow? Tonight? Today? This afternoon?

The kiss Dream leaves underneath his ear feels just shy of a wound, with traces of innocence and need mixed in.

He must *know* George’s answer. His hesitation. And why must he stay? Why must he *want* when George is this wary?

“I think we can be, George,” Dream says for him, reading his body and his breath and the eyes he cannot see from the angle they stand at. “You and me. The two of us. Teach me how to love you. Let me show you that this love between us can be all sorts of uncertain and still work just fine.”

George tilts his head to the side where Dream’s mouth is, and he breathes heavily toward him. His chest tightens. Both of his eyes close, and his hand grips over Dream’s that rests on his stomach.

“Right here,” George grits his jaw and reaches a hand toward the back of Dream’s neck, guiding his face closer and closer until their mouths hover dangerously, wet lips parting. “Just love me right here. That’s all I need, *please*.”

“Okay,” Dream says before kissing him, before drawing an impatient breath from George’s mouth and watching his knees buckle from underneath him. “Okay,” he says.

They kiss underneath the water, with hands that go from wet hair to red-scratched chests, to bare hips and backs. Dream’s tongue is warm in the center of George’s, gifted with the taste of his toothpaste and mixed with George’s exhilaration. Their hands are quick and soft, needy and fragile, closing in on the tenderness of each other’s skin.

It’s a desperate kiss. George figures out when Dream whimpers against his teeth and when his fingers poke at the back of his ribs. They’re working on the same broken clock, dancing on the same hot water, yet their mouths move at such a slow, passionate pace. And George hardly knows how to handle it because his body pools blood-red somewhere far, far inside, and he wants *closer*.

“I don’t even—” George tries to say, but feels a tinge in his back, like the bumblebees are telling him to *shut up!* *Enjoy this.*

“Let’s get out of the shower,” Dream kisses at George’s forehead, holding at his trembling fingers.

“My hair’s not washed,” George says, looking up at the bitten lip Dream has. He flushes when he sees it, trying to recall when exactly his teeth had snapped.

“Turn around,” Dream says lovingly again. “Let me wash your hair real quick, then we can get out.”

Then I can get inside you, he means.

And so George lets Dream stick his fingers into his hair, lathering shampoo and washing it out just moments after. He even hums, singing softly, letting his voice go against the shower walls and back through George’s ears as the two of them laugh, giving more sound to go around.

When the water goes off, Dream shivers and sneaks off to grab a couple of towels, telling George

to stay put.

George kisses him when he returns. Naked. Bare. With his mouth hovering over the corner of Dream's as he wraps George in a brown towel.

"Christmas Eve is tomorrow," Dream says as he brings their bodies closer. "I think—here, hold on, let me get you a sweater."

"Oh," George breathes. "Okay."

Christmas, he thinks. That's right.

The presents at the bottom of his suitcase and the books in his backpack. The gift George had bought on his family vacation to Italy, the one that he kept safe in his room, had shown to Dream many, many times before, promising to bring to him one day. The pajama pants that he knew he wanted to wear near the holiday.

Dream returns wearing a shirt and sweatpants, carrying a sweater in his hand, and he soon dresses George just like he had undressed him. George stays quiet, his body in some reserved state as he watches water drip from the tips of Dream's blond hair.

"Your hair's still wet," he giggles quietly as soon as his chest is covered and warm.

"I know." Dream shakes his head a little, handing George a pair of boxers and shorts. He reaches for the towel next to where George is leaning, but doesn't get the chance to put it up to his hair.

"Here, let me," George says as soon as he's dressed, tossing the towel over the top of Dream, watching him scramble for both the towel and the sides of George's waist.

George notices how boyish he looks and how uncomplicated Dream's breaths are as he hooks his hand on the sink next to George's thighs and as he slumps his shoulders forward, as he lets the effort of George's hands guide through his hair under the towel. It's all sorts of good, George thinks as he watches Dream allow George to warm him up.

He rubs back and forth and dries his hair patiently as Dream's touch rises to George's thigh, brushing with just his fingertips.

"I want to give you the best Christmas," Dream says as he tosses the towel onto the floor. "Like. I don't know. Fuckin' cookies and presents and—*can't get you any snow*—but I want it to be perfect. You know?"

"Fuck the snow, New York gave me that. I'm here." George reminds him with the taut spread of his mouth. "That's all I need. This is a gift in itself."

"But there's more you'd want surely," Dream sighs with a twisted look on his face. He shows curiosity in it, something akin to uncertainty.

George chuckles indifferently. "Not at all."

Dream hits the lightswitch and pulls George from the counter, guiding him back to the bedroom.

"Not even like, a new setup or like a subscription to something?" Dream blinks profusely as he sits George on the edge of the bed. "Sit here, let me—hold on."

He disappears into the bathroom again, leaving George in his thoughts for a moment, alone over

the spread of Dream's bed. It's so warm underneath him, and to his sides, and inside of the sweater he wears. He craves more. More of the raw desire he's been clinging to for weeks and weeks and weeks.

Thinking like this, thinking of Dream, and finally letting the thoughts fill his head regarding Dream's absence is like he's being drenched with restlessness. He wants to say something about it.

His mouth opens and closes quickly as he watches Dream walk toward him, a brush in his hand.

"I don't have a comb, so I can only use this," he says as he presses his shoulder to his ear, "that okay?"

George cocks his head to the side and lets the force of his body take him. All of the heat in his belly and the ropes tied around his heart. The hammering at his bones that has his fingers twitching along his sides, right near his hips where he wants Dream's mouth and his touch.

It is love he feels, burning violently in the center of his chest and in the beds of his nails, right behind his kneecaps where he cannot reach. It inches across his skin until it covers him.

He nods slowly, never letting his eyes shy away from the wet eyelashes on Dream's face.

"That's fine," he whispers, shifting just inches until his knee can prop up on the bed.

So Dream joins him and sits to the side of the mattress, putting slight pressure of his own knee up against the dimples at George's back. He brushes through his hair in a heedful motion, back and forth as George lets his eyes flutter shut.

He understands the stilling of Dream's hands as they follow the pattern through his hair. The way Dream scrapes the back of his head and panes down his scalp, down the nape of his neck to pinching the muscles of his upper back with his fingers every few moments.

It's relaxing, being able to feel like this.

By now, George sees just how special this touch is. How Dream's chest must be rattling, too, screaming at him in such angry tones of red, burning him. Because as George rests his own hand on Dream's knee, he stutters on the realization that Dream really is his to have.

His.

In a swift movement, George reaches behind him to stop Dream's brushing. He takes a deep breath and holds it behind his ribs, somewhere far into his lungs, feeling the heat of it searing his body.

He touches the edges of his own waist, fingertips grazing to the point where he gives himself butterflies just imagining Dream's hand there.

A cool draft of silence is present, and the air conditioner busies around them, comes in between their bodies and wraps around George's arms as he pulls on the bottom of his sweater and as he arches his back forward.

Dream watches.

And George can tell because the eyes are so attentive even from behind. This is how Dream observes him even from an ocean's distance, with all of that thick tension on the thin screen.

George doesn't turn, but he tilts his head to the side when Dream's hand touches the first inch of

bare skin, following blindly.

He lifts, and lifts, and then lifts, and feels himself blush even darker when Dream goes to assist in undressing him for yet another time. As soon as he holds the sweater, he balls it up and rests it in his lap, keeping the sleeves still stuck in his hands, like little paws. And behind him, Dream runs his hands over his back, over his shoulder blades, and presses forward silently to lay a kiss on George's shoulder.

George falls back into his touch and lets Dream wrap his arms around him, lets his fists rest against his belly underneath the sweater, where it is warm.

It's his desire to feel Dream. To have his hands splay over him, to expand over his skin and reach for where it'll ease a whimper out of him, to calm him.

George turns his neck, and Dream explores the language he speaks, the turns of his head and the removal of his shirt, the way Dream breathes in when George breathes out.

It's like he's ending his sentences when George is starting them.

George holds over Dream's hands that rest on his stomach. He intertwines their fingers.

"You're trying to learn me," George whispers into Dream's space when he realizes, reaching a hand backward.

Dream hums. "I told you I would."

It shouldn't have this big of an impact on him.

This is Dream. Dream whose hands are placed over George's body, rubbing back and forth comfortingly. Dream who has just brushed George's wet hair, who has just kissed George in the shower. Dream who wants to learn how to love him in ways that'll please George, that'll make him happy.

"Christ," George swears slowly, bringing his hands back to Dream's wrists, squeezing.

He lowers himself before he turns all the way, pushing Dream until he is flat on his back. It takes just a moment before George is resting his head on Dream's chest, pressing his ear into Dream's chest. There is no hushed beat underneath him, no sort of heavy patter against his ear. He's not exactly listening for a song to play, and rather is hoping for a hum to nuzzle his skin, to breathe against him.

He listens for the beat that he knows is *his*.

Patient fingers rise to draw lazily against his bicep, and Dream adapts to the change in position, exhaling as he grazes George's skin.

This, George thinks. This is what I have been waiting for.

"I cannot read your mind, George," Dream says as he hooks an ankle around George's calf.

"Then don't."

Dream scoffs.

George wonders if Dream's thoughts are racing like his are.

Love and sex and touch and Christmas and this bed and their relationship, everything all over the place. The way their fingers aren't intertwined, but the way their souls kind of are. The way George wants to let his tears soak into Dream's shirt, and the way he wants them to stain him.

He grits his teeth and rubs his nose back and forth over Dream's chest.

"This hurts," George mutters, giving Dream the words he wants.

Dream stiffens underneath him, and George almost takes his words back to bury them inside himself again, but he remembers how much communication means to Dream. How much it means to both of them in theory with establishing relationships like this.

"What does?" Dream whispers, nervously.

George leans his chin on Dream's sternum, lifting himself by planting his hands underneath himself.

"Wanting you this bad." He blinks, keeping his eyes closed to reflect. When he opens them, he finds Dream peering back.

And soon, this awful, awful look crosses Dream's face. He says nothing as he takes the turn of his lips and replaces it with a frightening pout. George would reach for it if he wasn't already completely in Dream's space.

His tongue builds up in his mouth. This guarded sensation in his chest is too painful.

Dream sighs. "Take me. Have me."

"That's bullshit."

"Why?" Dream presses, probably knowing he shouldn't. "Why is it bullshit, George? What is holding you back this much?"

George is all over his feet, digging into his core, and Dream is only trying to understand the root source of what it all means to have George pull back when he is so desperate in the same sense as him.

"Because it is not perfect with all of this back and forth," he croaks, looking to Dream and then away, like the gaze hurts. "I'm sorry."

Tears burn in his eyes.

"What makes you think that love needs to be perfect?" Dream sits back up, moving George to sit with him.

George accepts the position, taking into consideration that Dream's feelings are on the shell of his skin, and he's stuttering over his words as if he's going to lose George if he says the wrong thing.

George, who is already deep, deep inside of Dream's skin, who has already memorized how long Dream holds his breath before he sighs.

His cheeks brighten in their color, to a shade that haunts him, a hue that he hates on himself. It's embarrassing to turn this way as he sits beside Dream and as he gnaws on the front of his lip that was just in Dream's mouth.

"That's how I've always seen it," George whispers with defeat. "How I was told to love."

Dream shuffles, shaking his head like he's upset.

The edge of his voice crumbles, and George frowns at his clasped hands when Dream sighs.

"George," he whispers. "Look at me. Please?"

There is a coolness in the room, much softer against both of their cheeks, easing the harder blush they both had when they stepped out of the shower. Dream, more so, looks lonely. Pale. Weaker.

George regards him silently, painful burning in the corners of his eyes shouting at him already.

But the touch on his cheek is rewarding. Dream's palm is a gift against his skin.

"Love is fucking messy," he whispers, looking between George's eyes as though he is still precarious. "Love is good. Love is you, and it's me, and you don't have to love me back right now, but—"

"I do." George interrupts as he places his hand over Dream's, leaning even heavier into the touch, sinking into the waters Dream holds out for him. "I do."

Dream nods at him. It hurts the way he looks at George. Like he wants to fall forward and never stop falling. "Okay," he says, and keeps nodding.

The tight expression in his face relaxes upon hearing George's words, and the whimpering of George's breaths eases the moment he understands that Dream's tension is slipping. Because of each other.

"Then we work on that," Dream thumbs over his mouth and frowns with pulled brows. "We learn how to love each other, how to trust each other."

"I do trust you," George reassures him.

"I know," Dream says quickly, dragging his own lip back into his mouth. "I know, George, but these thoughts don't end here. So we'll get a little stronger, and then stronger, so we know how to take care of each other when there is doubt."

George thinks Dream is remarkable in the way he speaks and the way he promises such sincere things through these kind words. He's breathtaking to listen to, to look at, and all George wants to do is *start* with him. Start learning and touching and creeping into the trembling crevasses of his heart until he's searched all of him.

He leans forward, dragging his hope with him, and by the time he reaches Dream, he feels two hands hold his face.

His body falls forward.

Dream kisses him, writes gentle words onto George's mouth as he holds his breath and fastens all of his light onto George's skin. He bites down, holds his teeth on George's bottom lip to taste warmth.

"Teach me how you like to be kissed," George whispers, his mouth still open, his tongue resting quietly. "Teach me *you*."

Dream hums and brings him onto his side.

"I like a little pain," Dream whispers as he pulls away. He guides George's hands to his hair. "Here

is good. I like to feel wanted. I like skin.”

Skin. George likes that, too.

He’s on his back now, and he arches to reach for Dream.

“I do too,” he breathes desperately. “Skin—*Dream*.”

George isn’t sure what he’s calling his name for, but it must be clear to Dream, because he gives George this enlightening grin, a mouth full of nervousness and eagerness. He nods, threading the tips of his fingers against George’s wet hair.

“I don’t think I will ever want to stop touching you,” Dream says quietly, parting his mouth when George reaches up to trace over his cheek.

George blinks slowly. “Never stop.”

“We’re getting—fuck—we’re getting a little desperate, George,” Dream nuzzles into his neck. “I want to fuck you so bad right now.”

George takes in a deep breath as his fingers tighten at Dream’s hair. He pulls, balls it between his fingers and in his fists as Dream stays stuck in his neck. The breaths he huffs onto George’s neck are warm, and they’re daring, and George is a little awestruck at how the tugging on his hair does nothing to pull him back.

Dream’s mouth is a whirlpool itself.

And George has fallen for it, painfully.

It makes him dizzy.

He wants his fingers down it; he wants his tongue inside it. He wants to taste and touch and get to know behind Dream’s teeth.

“But you’re not going to?” George asks, the pit in his belly burning hotter than he remembers it ever burning before.

Dream kisses underneath his ear. It’s a promise.

“Not yet,” Dream tells him. “I think it’d be too soon. I should give you time to prep, time to think, time to kiss me some more.”

He says the last part like he’s teasing him. George snickers.

Dream continues, “and besides. Tomorrow’s Christmas.”

George cradles his face.

“Are you planning on fucking me that hard, or what?” He teases back, wiping the corners of Dream’s eyes.

“Kind of,” Dream answers.

“Oh.”

Then they’re both laughing.

Dream sits back on his heels and leaves George resting on his back. His hand reaches out like he's trying to pull him up, but George lies there, and settles on messing with his fingers instead.

"It'll be our first time," Dream hums seriously this time. "I don't want to rush it, especially not when I haven't had the chance to at least change my sheets or buy new lube."

George covers his cheeks.

"You didn't buy new lube yet?" He teases.

"Shut up!" Dream presses his thumbs into George's sides. "No! I like buying new things. I wanna know what you like, so I don't know. Let's get the stuff we need first, talk about what we like and don't like."

George goes a little red in the cheeks.

He thinks Dream is perfect. Stupidly, fucking perfect.

"Make me breakfast," he mutters as he pulls himself from the bed. "I'm shy now, you dumbass."

Dream kisses George in front of Sapnap, at seven twenty-nine in the morning on Christmas Day, as soon as he's got his hands on the gift George has brought overseas with him.

"Oh shit," Sapnap mumbles as he looks down at his hands, trying to busy himself with something to pretend he doesn't see his two friends this intimate when they haven't exactly explained that they are—*this* intimate.

"You got this? Back when you went to Italy?" Dream asks as he pulls away, his fingers still lingering against George's face.

In Sapnap's hands is something similar, and he inspects it with a genuine smile, like he's happy to see something of George's in his possession.

George tilts his head back to Dream to watch him turn the gift around.

He's still warm from their night, from the press of their bodies in the same bed, skin and more skin and blankets and ankles wrapped. He's still warm, but now his nose is red and cold and he grips a coffee mug that holds orange juice because he doesn't want to be too warm this morning, and it was the first thing Dream had offered the second he had woken him up and the second he had whispered, Merry Christmas at the shell of his ear.

A gentle sigh leaves George's mouth. He licks his lips and tastes Dream there.

He nods.

"I saved it all this time," George whispers into his mug, shrugging. "Did you not think I'd ever bring it?"

Dream sputters a moment, looking between him and the snow globe in his hands. He blinks. Dream has always been a fool for them.

“I guess I just thought you kept it at home. I don’t know,” he huffs, the smile on his face growing wider.

“I’ve got books too,” George perks up. “They’re not wrapped, but they’re in my bag, and they’re the ones you’ve been begging to read.”

Dream’s face lights up. “The books,” he says sincerely.

It’s incredible to see him like this. Soft-boned, eyes just shy of full relaxation.

“Yes,” George nods, bumping his crossed legs up and down a few times as he looks between the two sitting by the tree in the living room. “Merry Christmas.”

In front of him, Sapnap stands.

He regards Dream for a minute, and the two of them speak to each other with a few strange tugs of their eyebrows and slow shakes of their heads. George supposes it is something that they’ve learned from each other in the months they’ve lived together.

“Now?” Sapnap whispers to him, clearly not leaving room for George to be excluded.

“Now *what*?” George asks, already curious.

Dream looks to George with a rounded smile, still morning-soft and still enough to make his insides want to turn to mush. Dream rests his fingers on George’s knee, rubbing back and forth carefully.

“Now’s fine, Sapnap,” Dream murmurs.

There’s a little turn in George’s stomach when Sapnap leaves and when he returns by pushing in a large cardboard box, big enough to hold some large dog, about a hundred pots and pans, and maybe Dream if he wanted to fit in there. He stares at it and then turns slowly back to his friends.

“What’s in there?” He asks.

“Open it.”

“What’s in there?” He asks again, this time with a shaky voice and a nervous stomach. *This time*, scooting forward with a widening smile and curious eyes.

The music on the television increases in its volume, and Sapnap sits on the couch this time, while Dream slides up next to George. He looks like he’s close to choking on his nerves, and it scares George.

“You don’t have to,” Dream blurts before George can even open the box.

It’s the size of him, for fuck’s sake.

He turns to Dream.

“What?”

“Nothing.” Dream shakes his head.

“Open it!”

You don't have to love me back right now, George remembers. And then he gets it.

This box is a commitment.

"You want me to move in," he mutters under his breath, eyes flitting over to Dream and then up to Sapnap.

People sometimes gnaw on their lips when nervous, but Sapnap shoves his hands underneath his thighs. And he pulls his eyebrows until they threaten to rip apart.

"Yeah," Sapnap says. And probably because he notices how terrified Dream looks. "We never really got that far. Talking about it all. Christmas was going to be a time where we got to—where we could ask. But, I don't know. Do you want to? Is that something you'd wanna do? You know, *stay*?"

The humming inside of George's body is turning into a violent scream. He's thinking about *mornings*. He's thinking about waking up next to Dream, learning how to love him, making breakfast with his best friends even though he doesn't like cooking in the early hours of the day. He's thinking of late nights, and knocking on Sapnap's door to shove his nose into his neck and curl into his side just because. *Just because*.

He's thinking. And his eyes are burning.

"I have never wanted anything more."

Dream's hand brushes his inner thigh along the pajama pants he has on, and he presses his palm as though he's thanking him, encouraging him. He leans forward, gets into George's space to rest his cheek on his shoulder, intertwining his arm underneath George's as he grips his forearm.

And it's so domestic like this that George almost starts sobbing.

The touch.

The look from Sapnap across the room.

"Then open the box," Dream whispers, brushing his thumb up and down George's skin. "See what's inside."

Sighing, George slips from Dream's embrace and climbs to his knees, feeling like a child opening the most important gift of the morning.

There's so much safety in this spot on the floor, between all of their bodies and underneath the dimmed lights, between the rays of sunshine that are coming through the windows.

Patches is near, cuddled up near Sapnap's feet, watching like she's hoping George's answer has already been given.

It's just pretty, George realizes. This living room. This pain in his chest, this breath he holds back as he pulls the cardboard back.

At the top of the box rests an envelope with a red ribbon.

A house key. His.

Underneath sit a few sweatshirts, their Christmas merch. Sapnap's. Dream's. George's. And one of all three of them. Some socks, sweatpants.

“Our merch,” George says in disbelief, turning toward them, blinking to rid the haziness in his vision. “I never could get this.”

Dream nods, resting his fingers on the small of George’s back. “I know. Shipping was going to be shitty. So, I just figured. You know. I’d wait until your visit.”

George grins shyly. “It’s perfect.”

He wants to slip into it, show it off to the two. He wants to feel it fit over his body.

“We’ve got a bunch more if you want bigger, or smaller. Or mine,” Sapnap jokes, causing Dream to scoff his direction. “Or, or *Dream’s*.”

Even though the box is this big, George is surprised at the amount of things that are inside.

There are so many little things. Hangers for the closet, new bed sheets, bottles of shampoo, body wash, sugar scrubs, pool floats, an expensive bottle of whiskey. There’s some wrapped up fanmail, a new charger, lotions, a basket of candies and snacks and soda George likes. There’s a desk lamp. Tea bags. George swoons.

A handmade pillow stands out, and George pulls it from in between the mass of items to look at it.

It’s got his initials on it, and he frowns upon seeing it, blinks at the tears that are already crawling out from his eyes.

“Sapnap made it,” Dream whispers just a few inches from George’s ear. “He started sewing a while ago, and he insisted on making that for you. I have a matching one. Think he’s got one, too.”

In the next couple of moments, George welcomes the tears.

He cries.

It is Christmas morning, and he holds a homemade pillow, holds Dream’s hand, and sits in front of the commitment of a box that breathes and begs him to *come home*. So, of course, George sighs into the desperation of a soft cry as Dream nuzzles into his neck.

“Merry Christmas, George,” he whispers, pressing a kiss to where his heart speaks against his skin.

—

When George asks, Dream cooks with him.

When George asks, Dream stays in bed with him.

When George asks, Dream kisses the back of his neck, colors his pulse point a violet shade, a purple silk that ends up spread underneath his ears and right under the tip of his chin. It’s dreadful how much George enjoys it, how much he cannot stay away from the desire he feels toward Dream.

Each time, Dream will touch him with these private hands, just for him, and he will speak with this mouth of sweet love, whispering words in return, telling George that he can, “*take, take, take.*”

And George does.

Especially in the mornings. After he wakes, when the silkiness of Dream's sheets still clings to him, and after his mouth tastes like mint, when his cheek is still hot from the press of the pillows and Dream's chest.

He takes. And he takes. Pressing his nose into Dream's chest and his neck, sucking against skin, crawling into veins and beneath bones until he breaks through, until Dream whimpers and grips where he's been desperate to hold on to.

These moments are sacred between them. They are new, which is why George uses his fingers and his palms to touch over Dream's bare abdomen and his chest. He feels. And he learns. Because to familiarize himself means he is learning, and it is all he wants in these early days in Dream's home, and in his bedroom.

Passion leaves through his hands.

"Lie on your back," Dream whispers to him, leaving a kiss against his palm.

George does.

He follows, letting Dream kiss down his neck, down his chest, down his naval until George's back is no longer touching the mattress.

It's worth it, to lie here, to tangle his desire with Dream's, to melt with him with the sunlight that drowns the both of them on this bed.

They've finally let it in, since Dream has wanted it. It isn't George's choice. He prefers the darker mornings, the closed curtains, but Dream's loves the kiss of the morning sun, and George loves him.

"Okay—" George nods to himself, speaking in this careful tone like he's using his voice for the first time this morning. He sinks back on the bed when Dream's tongue flattens low on his belly.

I think I'd die if you kissed me here; he remembers saying once before.

"Okay," he says again, tugging on Dream's hair with the strength of a hopeless man. "Please, Dream."

It does not need to be said. Dream understands the moment the hurried voice falls from George's mouth, whispered meekly. George is confident as he speaks, but his tongue is low in his mouth, pressed harshly behind teeth that want to bite, teeth that are threatening to fall from his mouth if Dream doesn't get inside him.

Dream's eyes lift to meet his eyes, and they look at each other with Dream's chin scraping the spot underneath George's belly button.

He grins profusely, blushes a dark shade of rose to remind George just how nervous the both of them are.

"Are you ready?" George asks him, letting thumbs press into Dream's cheekbones when he pulls the waistband of George's pants lower to find more skin. "Do you want this?"

Dream takes his time. And he always has. He's always been patient. Loving George, speaking to George, kissing up George's chest, leaving a trail of desire behind him. George whispers these soft

melodies, allowing for Dream to hear all of them, not allowing them to stay behind his screen or behind his teeth any longer.

They are Dream's to have.

So he lets him take. And *he* takes.

"Yes," Dream promises to George over every press of his mouth. "Fuck, George, yeah, I want this," he says to him as he undresses him and as he separates the blankets and as he carefully intertwines their hands.

George is in his head by now, and he's thinking about how long he's waited to finally feel all of this skin, and how many nights he's wanted to feel the press of Dream's hip, the swell of his cock this delicate against his own.

It's foreign, just to feel, and to have this touch. This warmth. And George is greedy as his hands slick over and as his thumb presses and as a wetness grows between them. He giggles, and he whimpers, and he shakes when Dream wraps his larger hand around the both of them, shifting up and down, and then holding, making George twitch like he never has before.

His nails drive into Dream's bicep. It's familiar, and Dream likes the pain. He's told George this before, but George is still careful as he looks up at Dream and then back down to where they seem to be connected over hands and where heat lies.

"Why does it—*god*—it's so good," George urges Dream to move his hand, but Dream waits, and he drops a string of spit to coat the both of them a little slicker, and George nearly loses it. "You're so dead."

"I'm dead?" Dream teases as his hand speeds up. He's on the edge, he's teetering, *he's so close* and George wants him to come before he does like it's some fucking competition. "You're about to leave cum over the both of us right now before I even get anywhere close, baby, I mean—*look at you*."

George's stomach curls in. He tilts forward, and his forehead hits Dream's, cracking it in some sense, falling right into the crooks of where he desires Dream most. He crumbles, and he bites his tongue until he tastes the filthiness of copper.

Despite the way he smiles, and the way his body is completely boneless as Dream jerks them off, Dream comes first. And George moans with him as if he's the one who has just coated the both of them.

It is quiet afterward—after Dream's shaky hand continues, and after George kisses him, tells him he can finish himself in the smoothest voice, and after Dream insists until George is just as fucked out as he is. It is quiet afterward, and it is peaceful. And it is sticky.

Dream speaks first with his splayed fingers across George's chest, touching him with a thumb wedged between his collarbones.

"We'll need a pillow under your back," Dream tells him in a hushed voice, moving the sheets up to wipe his thighs and George's belly. "For in a little bit."

George looks at the sheets. Then to Dream. He grimaces a little.

Love is messy. Sex is messy.

“A little bit?” He repeats playfully. “You don’t want to give it a few hours?”

Dream brushes his hair back, a few sweat-slicked pieces staying stuck to his forehead. “Do you?”

They look at each other with a humorous glint in both their eyes. “No.”

He doesn’t. He’s still burning low, sensitive, and wanting, wanting, and needing. So, he cups a hand around Dream’s nape and pulls him forward until their mouths fasten.

George’s heart is a lot more greedy this time. It’s still got the same amount of desire to take and pull and push that it had earlier, but this time he kisses Dream like he’s accepting every word Dream has ever said to him. All the love he’s offered, the friendship, the promises, the home, the hope, the messiness of their relationship, the trust.

And maybe it’s how Dream kisses back, too.

With the shyness of a lackadaisical tongue, pushing warmth into George’s mouth and drawing it out with the breaths he pulls back.

“I love you,” George whispers to him, his thoughts driving him to speak. He says it again, and then again as Dream drops to his jaw and to his neck, lighting him aflame. George cradles Dream’s head as he bites into the muscle of his shoulder. “I want to love you more than I’ve loved anything before.”

Dream hears him, soothes at the sound of him.

And later, when Dream is inside of him, he adjusts the pillow underneath George’s back because Dream is gentle, and Dream is caring, and George is so irrevocably in love with him.

They do not look away from each other.

George almost thinks it’s strenuous like this. Maybe he had thought it to be before, how keen eye contact was during sex, during such intimate moments like this—but there is not a single thought in George’s head that insists he look away from Dream. Not when his eyes are this low and certainly not when he keeps whispering how *beautiful George looks* and how much he wants to *please him*.

The push of Dream’s cock is repetitive. Dream keeps his pace steady as he sinks in and then as he pulls out just far enough to drive his hips until George’s mouth falls open again, just until his prostate receives the touch. George shivers, letting Dream feel it all the same, letting Dream experience the same sensation as George tries to ride his own hips upward.

“Fuck, George,” Dream mutters, gruff voice only a whisper in George’s head compared to all the pounding emotion. “The way you’re moving is—*Oh shit.*”

George is relentless as his head tosses back.

They seem to have a lack of pillows on the bed because the crown of George’s head meets the mattress and skims against the headboard and he whimpers at the pain. Dream halts at the realization, and George sucks in a harsh breath when he stops inside him.

“Move!” George cries out, his nails forcefully pressing into Dream’s neck. “You’re such an asshole, you’re such an asshole. Oh my god, I’m going to come because of you. Like, *right now!*”

Dream chuckles softly, and George’s heart flip-flops in his chest, his belly wets with the cum that drips from the head of his cock, and he feels so at ease.

It's so simple, so fucking simple to just want and have and love like this.

Dream leans forward, pulls George's hands down from around his neck and intertwines their fingers. He keeps his pace steady, hesitates because his breaths are uneven, because George is tight and Dream is teetering again and George knows it, he fucking knows it, he can see it glistening in Dream's eyes.

They're fucking softly now, and George's lips are wet when Dream kisses him.

"You okay?" Dream whispers into his mouth, taking the time to keep his pace and pay attention to how George is. "Your head?"

George parts his lips to speak, but only a mere sound of a cry slips out. He cradles Dream's cheek and nods, and Dream has to take it as a promise that yes, *I'm good*.

"Slowly, Dream," George whispers as he closes his eyes. "Go *slower*."

Dream listens.

The slow part doesn't last long because neither of them do, but George feels closer than he ever has before.

Dream's mouth stays open and his head stays solid to George's, and George kisses him to promise his serenity, to ease his lasting whispers onto the redness of Dream's lips, where he wants to stay forever.

George seems to recover quicker than Dream does, catching his breath a lot faster, gaining feeling to his fingers and his legs that still shake when he adjusts his position.

To his side, Dream lies with his eyes closed, a blush high on his cheekbones and spit still coating his lips. George giggles at the sight of him, a giddy sensation riding up in his chest, blooming under his lungs and wrapping around his ribs.

Dream reaches blindly for his hand, pulling it to his mouth to kiss the warmth of his knuckles.

"You all right?" George asks him, the patient turn of his tongue still a little hot from Dream's mouth.

There's a little hum to Dream's body when he turns back on his side and when he regards George, when he laughs and squints his eyes candidly.

He wipes between them again with the sheet. *Messy*. He pulls George to his chest, pressing sweat to more sweat and skin to more skin. *Messy*. He kisses him, dips his tongue to taste George, to promise him he is all right, that he is nothing but all right. He kisses him, brushes his thumb over George's eyelashes and his eyebrow, pushes the skin of his cheek back until he sees red. *Messy*.

"I love you," Dream murmurs to him.

And George believes him, because he has every reason to.

These mornings are reserved for this sort of feeling. This tough pull against his chest, this anchor dragging him down, down, and further down until he's sunken so far in love with Dream that all he knows is his family.

He's used to the loneliness, used to mornings of darkness and cold sheets and paying attention to

people who are not beside him. He's used to calling Dream, listening to the voice in his ear and lining up his breathing so it matches.

But this is what home is to George.

Home is touching Dream's skin, memorizing the way his collar bones dip and the way he smirks at George with a raise of an eyebrow before he wants to kiss him, or the way he paints George's cheek with the elegance of a touch of his thumb, just to feel.

Because he can.

This is what home is to George. This is what family is to George. And he wants to learn how to love Dream in all these complicated ways, in all these simple ways, in all these hopeless ways that'll make him feel complete.

"I want to be yours," George says to Dream with a toothbrush in his mouth, looking through the foginess of the mirror and back at Dream. "Like, in a way that you don't have anybody else."

Dream blinks at him, presses his hip to George's lower back. The mirror is foggy, but George can still see how wet Dream's eyelashes are. *That is what home is.*

Dream doesn't convince him he already is his. He doesn't sigh into George's shoulder, doesn't kiss him, doesn't rub into his skin that George needs to realize that they already are something. Instead, he pulls the toothbrush from his own mouth, lets toothpaste dribble from his chin, and he grins with the sweetness of a berry-fucking-blush.

"I would like to be yours too, George," he says softly. "Let's be each other's."

End Notes

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much love always, [reese!!](#)

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